

Graphic Novel 3

Title: *We Are Not Strangers*

Author: Josh Tuininga

Question	Response
Who is the main character and what challenges do they face related to identity or belonging? What specific moments or scenes show these challenges most clearly? What is at stake for the character if they do/don't belong?	Two characters. Two people who don't belong. Dire consequences if they don't. The main character is a man named Marco Calvo, though his grandson referred to him as "Papoo" or "my pappo." A challenge Marco faced with belonging was when he first arrived in the US. He was not specifically welcome. This is mostly shown on page 21, where it says, "The so-called Land of Opportunity...wasn't as welcoming as he had imagined." Later in the book, he also faced challenges with not being seen as a traitor. When the country was at war, they were suspicious of people who were different from them. If Marco drew too much attention to himself, he could get hurt, or kicked out. This can be seen on page 155. Another important character is Sam Akiyama. He and his family were taken to an incarceration camp due to the fact that they are Japanese. On pages 111 through 115, we can see the Akiyamas being taken to an incarceration camp. Because they didn't belong, they were taken from their home. They did not necessarily belong after this. Even when Sam returns, he is not welcomed. This is illustrated on pages 126-127, where we see them driving by signs that say, "Japs/Keep Out/You are Not Wanted," and "Japs Keep Moving/This is a White Man's Neighborhood." This shows that they were not welcomed back. Because the Japanese weren't welcome, they did not have the same chances at finding housing or jobs. On pages 128-129, it says, "Most had to start their lives over completely. Unable to find work, some fell homeless and destitute..." If it weren't for Marco, the Akiyama would have been left without a good option for housing or work. It is sad that people who have different cultures from us are excluded, and left without the same freedoms as the rest of us.

What messages does the text communicate about being "American?" What specific scenes and direct quotes support these ideas? Are these messages simple or complex? Explain.	If your friend was in trouble, how far would you go to help them? The author gives the message that being American means forming a tight community with your neighbors. In the book, Marco helps Sam keep his home and business even though Sam was a Japanese-American. The afterword also gives other stories of those who helped their family and friends after the incarceration. On page 180, it says, "Marco's reaction to the removal of Sam Akiyama depicted in the graphic novel emerges as one possibility in a wide range of responses among Sephardic Jews to Japanese incarceration...." which continues on to say, "When another Japanese family, the Kusunosos, left, Dejaen recalls that the Cornell (originally Coronel) Family, also Sephardic Jews, rented their place. When the Kusunosos returned, the Cornells returned the property and the rent money due to them." This is similar to the arrangement made in <i>We Are Not Strangers</i> between Sam and Marco. There were several other examples of good friends and communities throughout the Afterword. This is a fairly simple concept to understand. It is easy to see that people helped other people, though it does take some critical thinking to figure out what specific message Josh Tuninga is trying to send. Despite this, it does seem like the author is not completely patriotic to America, and he does mention a strikingly close comparison to Nazi Ghettos. On page 142, there are two newspaper articles, one from 1940 and one from 1942. Both are about the groups of people being sent away. This helps portray a complicated message about how America isn't always the land of the free, and the fact that we are basically doing what other people have done before. History has a way of repeating itself in the worst ways.

What role do culture, music, food, holidays, language, and traditions play in your identity? Be specific and share your life experiences so others get to know you better. How do these same elements shape the character's identity in the novel? Use specific quotes/text evidence from the text to prove your answer.	How is your identity affected by everyday aspects of life, such as food or language? I love playing music on my clarinet. Because of this, I am an accomplished clarinetist. On Christmas eve, we eat tocos, which evolved from having New Mexican food (tamales and green chile stew). I am Christian, so I do celebrate advent and Christmas. In some families, the way they give gifts is different from the way I give gifts. Instead of giving gifts that are meaningful to the person, as I do, they might give lots of cheap gifts or everyone the same gift. This may not have a huge impact on my identity, though it could make me more thoughtful. I don't feel like these elements really have as much of an impact on my identity as they do for other cultures. Food plays a decent part in the identity of both Sam and Marco. On page 39, Sam is eating some sort of food that gives a hint that he is Japanese. On page 57, Noni is making bolemas, which is a pasty that is filled with spinach and cheese. This is most likely a traditional Jewish food. Marco and his family also speak a different language at times, probably Ladino. This food and language help him to identify as a Sephardic Jew, instead of an Ashkenazic Jew. He also celebrates Shabbat HaGadol, or the Great Sabbath. This, as well as Passover, are important for Jews, and it further helps to understand that Marco is Jewish. This could be why he helped Sam; his people suffered similar things in the past. Both Sam and Marco have very different identities and cultures, but they are connected by a similar past.
What patterns do you notice across different texts about identity and belonging? Where do they agree? Where do they conflict? Why might authors portray "being American" differently?	Not belonging can be a common theme, but how you don't belong is determined by your own experiences. A lot of the graphic novels we are reading are about someone who doesn't belong. In <i>MexiKid</i>, Pedro has to figure out how he belongs and discover who he is. <i>Displacement</i>, <i>We Are Not Strangers</i>, and <i>They Called us Enemy</i> all portray people who have to go through incarceration. From what I have heard of other books, other students or people look down upon or exclude the main character. The difference is the way in which the character doesn't belong. Often, this person is from a different culture, such as a Mexican American or a Japanese American. The authors portray being American differently because they

	have had different experiences. The author of <i>Mexikid</i> probably didn't have an ancestor who went through incarceration, so he didn't write about that. Instead, he wrote about his own personal experience. Kiku Hughes did have a grandma who was incarcerated, so it was meaningful to write about that. Your own unique experiences influence how you see the world.
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Can someone be American without feeling like they belong? Why or why not? Use more than one piece of evidence from books, shows, movies, personal experience, or real life to support your answer.	Is being American fitting in, or is it staying true to the values we were supposed to be founded on? Someone could be American and still not feel like they belong. First, you could literally be an American. You could actually be a citizen of the US, yet still feel out of place. However, I feel like you could be an American by heart. You could stand for the freedom of others, even if you face prejudice. You could seek equality. These are the standards that America was founded on. Some Japanese Americans stood up for what was right and fought back against incarceration. In <i>Displacement</i>, there were the "no-no" people who answered no to two loyalty survey questions. Also, the people went on strike to get a funeral for the person who was shot. In history, women and black people fought for the right to vote, and for equal rights for all. Some of these people may not have felt like they belonged, due to the prejudice that others forced upon them, but they do have an "American heart." People who do not believe in some of these values aren't necessarily American. They don't try to give freedom to all. They want to deny people basic rights that they should be entitled to. If these are what America was founded on, then these people aren't American. Those who believe in what is right, and who try to make a change to current unfairities are the only true Americans here.

List ways our class has defined what it means to be American. Then explain: How has your own definition of "American" changed through these stories? Use specific evidence from the graphic novels you read to support your perspective.	● Fast food ○ Lots of fast food chains ○ We stray from some older traditions, such as eating at home together as a family ○ We don't always care about a healthy diet ● Decent education ○ Other places don't have as much education or the not everyone has access to it ● Equal rights ○ People are given the same chances ● Freedom ○ Free speech ○ Democracy: we get to choose our leaders People often think of America as the land of the free, but people refuse to admit our flaws. Through reading these stories, I realized that America isn't simply a wonderful land of freedom. It still prosecutes and excludes people. In <i>We Are Not Strangers</i>, Marco is not welcomed into America. He was faced with prejudice. The quote: "He's likely a public charge." as said by a guard after Marco was pulled out of line on page 21, shows that they don't see him as an American. They are worried he will have to depend on the government and showing that he is undesirable. He also had to keep his head down when he helped keep Sam's house for him. On page 155, it says, "The country was at war... and suspicious of anyone who looked like a traitor." In the background, there is a bunch of propaganda, some against the Japanese, specifically "Jap Trap." This shows that America is not always welcoming to all, and that we do not always give freedom to everybody. We don't even let everybody go to the same schools. The books have shown me that America has a history where people have been excluded, even though we were supposed to have equal rights. The way I see America has changed through these eye-opening novels.

Next week you will interview an "elder" about their identity, experiences, and perspective on what it means to be American. 1) Generate at least 10 thoughtful interview questions that move from general □ specific □ reflective. 2) Your questions should go beyond basic facts and invite stories, perspectives and insight. They should also connect to ideas from your graphic novels (identity, belonging, culture, challenges) and will help you gather meaningful material to later craft a poem inspired by their experiences. Push yourself to ask open ended questions that reveal deeper thinking, not just facts. (Do NOT conduct your interview!!! Just generate questions for now.)	1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. 2. What do you believe to be your identity? What are your views? How do you think these compare to those of some Americans, and what views seem to be popular today? 3. Why do you think your identity is the way it is? 4. Throughout your life, how many times have you felt out of place or like you didn't belong? Why did you feel that way? 5. Have you ever felt excluded? If so, why do you think that you were excluded or not welcome? 6. Do you think that, today, you belong or are welcomed in society? How about when you are younger? Has this changed at all? 7. What do you know about some of the prejudice that certain groups of people have faced in the past? What is your opinion on this? 8. Do you think there is a need to stand up for a group of people right now? If so, how do you think we should stand up? 9. How was your childhood different from mine, in terms of views, techniques, and socially acceptable concepts? Do you think that some of how you were raised was dependent on who your ancestors were, or things like ethnicity or race? Do you think that, as popular views change, the way children are raised or what we are taught to believe change, and if so, how? 10. How do you think that your cultural view or beliefs have changed how you view being "American?" 11. Have your cultural beliefs changed, and if they have, how have your views or being American changed? 12. Has your view of the world changed as you have grown up? If so, what did you believe when you were little, and what do you believe now?

Who will you interview and why is this person a meaningful choice for this project? What do you hope to learn from them that you have not seen in the texts? How might this person's story help you better answer our essential question, "What does it mean to be American?"	I will interview my grandma, XXXXX. She has been around for a long time, and will have a lot of info to answer my questions with. I hope to learn about identity and experiences from someone who has faced less prejudice than other people. It would be interesting to see the contrast of point of views on what it means to be American. This will also give me another perspective of what it means to be American. I would be interested to hear her thoughts on some of the unfairness towards groups of people that we have seen in the past, as well as today. Her perspective will help me see what some essential parts of being American are. I can use all the perspectives and ideas I already have along with her opinion to formulate a good idea of what it means to be American. It will give me a bigger picture and a broader lens in which to look at the question. By interviewing my grandma, I will gain a lot of knowledge on the different perspectives and thoughts on being American.
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